

SPECIAL FEATURE  
GARY EDQUIST/NCA

MARCH 28, 1978

THE U-S ABORTION CONTROVERSY  
(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: DURING THE PAST DECADE IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, ABORTION HAS BECOME A SAFE AND ACCEPTED MEDICAL PRACTICE. EVERY YEAR, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED THIRTY TO FIFTY-FIVE MILLION ABORTIONS, AND HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, LAST YEAR, SLIGHTLY MORE THAN ONE MILLION WERE PERFORMED. THE ENTIRE ISSUE OF LEGAL ABORTIONS, HOWEVER, IS NOW AT THE CENTER OF A GROWING CONTROVERSY IN THIS COUNTRY. DURING THE 1977 CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE ON PUBLIC FUNDING OF ABORTIONS FOR POOR WOMEN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE MEDICAL CARE, SENATOR ROBERT PACKWOOD SAID, "ABORTION IS THE MOST DIVISIVE BASIC ISSUE (N THE COUNTRY). IT FAR OUTWEIGHTS," HE CONTINUED, "ANY OTHER ISSUE OF TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT SIGNIFICANCE." VOA'S GARY EDQUIST TAKES A LOOK AT THE ABORTION CONTROVERSY.

VOICE: ABORTIONS HAVE BEEN LEGAL IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE A 1973 RULING OF THE U.S. SUPREME COURT. BUT THE ROOTS OF THAT DECISION GO BACK NEARLY A DECADE BEFORE, TO THE MID-1960'S WHEN ALMOST A DOZEN STATES ENACTED LAWS PERMITTING ABORTIONS IN CASES WHERE THE PREGNANCY WOULD ENDANGER THE WOMAN'S HEALTH, IF THE CHILD WOULD BE BORN WITH A PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DEFECT, OR IF THE PREGNANCY WAS THE RESULT OF INCEST. BY 1970, FOUR STATES HAD PASSED LAWS WHICH SAID THAT A WOMAN COULD HAVE AN ABORTION, ON DEMAND. THEN FINALLY IN THE 1973 DECISION, THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT ANY STATE LAWS THAT RESTRICTED ABORTIONS WERE UNCONSTITUTIONAL, AND THAT AN ABORTION COULD NOT BE DENIED TO A WOMAN DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF A PREGNANCY.

VOICE: WITH THAT SUPREME COURT RULING, THE BATTLE LINES WERE DRAWN.  
(CONT'D) ONE ONE SIDE THE FOES OF ABORTION, INCLUDING NELLIE GRAY,  
PRESIDENT OF THE MARCH FOR LIFE. ON JANUARY 23, THE FIFTH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1973 SUPREME COURT DECISION ON ABORTIONS,  
NELLIE GRAY LED THOUSANDS OF SUPPORTERS ON WHAT SHE CALLED  
A MARCH FOR LIFE TO THE U.S. CAPITOL TO PROTEST LEGALIZED  
ABORTIONS. FOR HER ABORTION IS AN OUTRAGEOUS CRIME:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- NELLIE GRAY

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T "ABORTION IS THE KILLING OF AN INNOCENT PRE-BORN HUMAN BEING  
AND THAT IS THE SIMPLE PROPOSITION THAT WE ARE AGAINST. SO  
THAT ABORTION HAS NOW RISEN IN THE UNITED STATES UNDER  
EUPHEMISMS THINKING THAT IT IS SOMETHING OTHER THAN KILLING  
AN INNOCENT HUMAN BEING. IT IS NOT. /AND BECAUSE IT IS  
KILLING AN INNOCENT HUMAN BEING, WE HAVE TAKEN THE DEFENSE  
OF THAT CHILD AND THAT CHILD'S TRAUMATIZED MOTHER AND FATHER  
AS A CAUSE WHICH WE FEEL WE MUST MARCH FOR." /

VOICE: THOSE WORKING FOR ABORTIONS ARE EQUALLY OUTSPOKEN, AND  
INCLUDE THE NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION LEAGUE, OR NARAL,  
A GROUP WITH THE SINGLE PURPOSE OF WORKING IN CONGRESS TO  
PROTECT THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO HAVE LEGAL ABORTIONS. THE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION  
LEAGUE, KAREN MULHAUSER, SAYS MOST PEOPLE WHO FAVOR ABORTIONS  
SEE THEM AS A NECESSARY ALTERNATIVE TO GIVING BIRTH:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- KAREN MULHAUSER

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T "I THINK THEY RECOGNIZE ABORTIONS AS A NECESSARY BACKUP FOR  
EITHER FAILED CONTRACEPTIVE SERVICES OR WHEN CONTRACEPTION  
HAS NOT BEEN USED. AND IN FACT WHEN WOMEN ARE SEEKING  
ABORTION SERVICES, THEY ARE NOT DOING IT IN A LIGHT-HEARTED  
OR EASY WAY. /FOR MOST WOMEN THE DECISION TO HAVE AN ABORTION  
IS ONE THAT IS MADE WITH A CERTAIN DEGREE OF AMBIVALENCE.  
AND IT IS A CRISIS SITUATION IN A WOMAN'S LIFE. IT IS NOT  
ONE SHE WANTS TO GO INTO SEVERAL TIMES." /

VOICE: HOSTILITY IS INCREASING ON BOTH SIDES AND THE CONTROVERSY NOW SEEMS TO BE GOING IN A NEW , MORE VIOLENT, DIRECTION. ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION LEAGUE, AT LEAST FIFTEEN ABORTION AND BIRTH CONTROL CLINICS ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN ATTACKED BY ABORTION FOES IN THE PAST YEAR. AND A SPOKESWOMAN FOR NARAL (NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION LEAGUE) SAYS A GROWING ATMOSPHERE OF INTOLERANCE AND VIOLENCE IS ENCOURAGING SUCH ACTION. NELLIE GRAY OF THE ANTI-ABORTION MARCH FOR LIFE SAYS, HOWEVER, THAT HER ORGANIZATION DOES NOT BELIEVE IN VIOLENCE EVEN THOUGH, SHE GOES ON TO SAY, "ABORTION ITSELF IS PURE VIOLENCE." WHEN NELLIE GRAY SPOKE WITH VOA, SHE SAID:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- NELLIE GRAY

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"IT IS TRUE THAT THIS IS VERY DIVISIVE. YOU ARE EITHER FOR KILLING BABIES OR YOU ARE NOT. THERE IS NO IN BETWEEN. YOU CANNOT BE A LITTLE BIT PREGNANT AND YOU CANNOT BE A LITTLE BIT DEAD. /YOU EITHER BELIEVE IN THE VALUE AND DIGNITY OF HUMAN GEINGS AND PROTECTING THAT, OR YOU BELIEVE IN KILLING THEM. AND THE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN KILLING THEM ARE NOW TRYING TO PROTECT AND MAKE SOMEWHAT RESPECTABLE THEIR DIRTY BUSINESS. IT WILL NEVER BE A CLEAN BUSINESS, IT WILL ALWAYS BE KNOWN AS KILLING BABIES. THE ONLY THING NOW, IT IS LEGAL.../ AND THERE WILL BE A TIME WHEN THE RIGHT MEANING THE RIGHT TO LIFE, SHALL AGAIN BE THE LAW OF THE LAND OF AMERICA. AND THE PEOPLE WHO ARE KILLING BABIES WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTS. JUST AS ANYONE ELSE WHO HAS ACTED AGAINST HUMANITY."

VOICE: THOSE WHO SUPPORT ABORTIONS COME BACK TO THEIR BASIC ARGUMENT, THAT THE SUPREME COURT, THE HIGHEST LEGAL AUTHORITY IN THIS COUNTRY, HAS RULED THAT ABORTIONS ARE LEGAL. AGAIN, KAREN MULHAUSER OF THE NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION LEAGUE:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- KAREN MULHAUSER

"THIS IS A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY AND THERE ARE SO MANY...VIEW POINTS ON THIS THE DECISION IS TO BE LEFT TO THE WOMAN AND HER PHYSICIAN. THE VARIOUS RELIGIONS IN THIS COUNTRY DISAGREE. SOME SAY THAT LIFE BEGINS AT BIRTH, SOME SAY THAT IT BEGINS AT CONCEPTION. AND WE BELIEVE THAT THE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS THAT BELIEVE THAT LIFE BEGINS AT CONCEPTION HAVE NO RIGHT UNDER THE CONSTITUTION TO IMPOSE THAT BELIEF, THROUGH LEGISLATION OR LAW, ON ALL OTHER AMERICANS WHO DISAGREE. THAT IS A VIOLATION, A VERY CLEAR VIOLATION, OF OUR FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM."

VOICE: BECAUSE OPINIONS ARE SO SHARPLY DIVIDED, THE CONTROVERSY OVER ABORTIONS IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR A LONG TIME. THE ANTI-ABORTION FORCES PROMISE TO BE HARD AT WORK THIS YEAR IN STATE LEGISLATURES AND CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES FOR RESTRICTIONS ON ABORTIONS. PRO-ABORTION PEOPLE, ON THE OTHER HAND, WILL BE WORKING JUST AS HARD TO SEE THAT NO LEGISLATION IS PASSED WHICH WOULD LIMIT THE RIGHT OF A WOMAN TO HAVE A LEGAL ABORTION IN THE UNITED STATES.

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